

(RBNZ, 2022a)

## The history of banknotes in New Zealand

Learn how New Zealand's banknotes have evolved through history.

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## The world's earliest banknotes

Records exist of banking facilities in Babylon 4,000 years ago, and there is evidence that the Chinese, Greeks and Romans had banking facilities long before the Christian era.

### 700 AD

- The first true paper money appears in China. Paper money appeared in Europe several centuries later.

### 1694

- The Bank of England began issuing banknotes in exchange for deposits. The banknote also had spaces for a handwritten date, number, signature and the name of the payee. The banknotes showed the figure of Britannia, but had few other decorative features.

## New Zealand's first banknotes

In Aotearoa New Zealand, paper money arrived with the Europeans. In 1924, trading banks in New Zealand agreed on a standard design for banknotes.

## The Reserve Bank issues banknotes

By the 1920s, there was a general push to set up a central bank that would issue a single national currency. Talk of establishing a Reserve Bank in New Zealand went on through the 1920s.

### 1930

- The first Reserve Bank of New Zealand was set up with the sole authority to issue New Zealand's currency.

### 1932

- Work on new banknote designs begins.

### 1934

- The Reserve Bank of New Zealand issues the first banknotes in August 1934.

## A timeline of New Zealand banknotes

### **P** 1 August 1934 — series 1



↓ Series 1 banknotes

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## 6 February 1940 — series 2



↓ Series 2 banknotes

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## 10 July 1967 — change to decimal currency

Pre-decimal currency was relatively complex. Pounds were divided into 20 shillings or 240 pence. This resulted in 12 pence to the shilling. Guineas were worth slightly more than a pound but were not in common use. People got used to doing the fractions, but it was complex and the system of 100 cents to the dollar was simpler.

In 1963, the government decided to decimalise, with the changeover, dubbed 'Decimal Currency' (DC) day, set for 10 July 1967.

There were public discussions over what the new decimal money might be called. Words such as 'kiwi' and 'zeal' were proposed to avoid confusion with 'dollar', which most people at the time associated with American money.

In the end, though, the word 'dollar' was selected, and 'Mr Dollar' became the symbol of the change.

A lot of work went into changing from imperial currency, including a huge publicity campaign. A series of TV ads introduced the concepts to New Zealand viewers.

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### Mr Dollar - Advertisement on the introduction of decimal currency



↓ **Video transcript: Mr Dollar - Advertisement on the introduction of the decimal currency**

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## Now it can be told

This footage tells the story of the distribution of currency for decimalisation on 10 July 1967. \$120m of currency, weighing 730 tonnes was sent to nearly 600 bank branches around the country by plane, ferry, truck and train between April and June 1967 as part of 'Operation Overlander'. Everything went without a hitch and not one cent was lost!

## Now it can be told



↓ [Video transcript - Now it can be told](#)

## 10 July 1967 — series 3





↓ Series 3 banknotes

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### 1981 — series 4



↓ Series 4 banknotes

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### 1991 — series 5



↓ Series 5 banknotes

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## 1999 — series 6



↓ Series 6 banknotes

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## 2015 — series 7



↓ Series 7 banknotes

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